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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 009476

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING CHARGES PARLIAMENT WITH SECURITY AND REFORM

REF: A. AMMAN 9387

[B](#). AMMAN 9372

[C](#). AMMAN 9201

[D](#). AMMAN 8823

[E](#). AMMAN 8422

[F](#). 04 AMMAN 9762

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#). (C) In his annual speech opening parliament, King Abdullah called for continued reform and improved living conditions while strengthening Jordan's security and stability. Following the speech, East Banker strongman Abdul Hadi Majali succeeded in being re-elected Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies despite the opposition of the Islamic Action Front. Parliament has reacted favorably to the cabinet of Prime Minister Bakhit and is expected to give the new government a strong vote of confidence. END SUMMARY.

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THE KING TAKES THE FLOOR  
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[2](#). (U) King Abdullah opened the third session of the 14th Parliament on December 1 with his traditional "Speech from the Throne." At the onset of his speech, the King said he was inaugurating the legislature "in order to enhance our march in democracy, reform and modernization." He continued that "security and stability are the first among our national priorities," and thanked Jordan's military and security services for their role in protecting Jordanians from terrorism and violence. The King called for new legislation that would ensure that Jordan remain "an oasis of security and stability and a haven for freedom where human rights are respected."

[3](#). (U) Highlighting the need for greater "grass-roots participation in decision-making," King Abdullah endorsed the idea of dividing Jordan into different regions, each having its own elected council "responsible for devising plans and programs related to each respective region's development." He then recognized the role of the National Agenda (Ref D) as "the general framework for our development." The King pledged to put the Agenda in the hands of all Jordanians "for your discussion and benefit."

[4](#). (U) Similar to his speech opening parliament the previous year (Ref F), the King said that he personally felt "the suffering of my people and ... the extent of the economic difficulties they are facing due to the rise in prices, poverty and unemployment." He accordingly called on the government and parliament to "relieve people's suffering," in addition to advocating better coordination between the private and public sectors to avoid "a wasteful and inefficient distribution of resources."

[5](#). (U) The King admonished MPs "to rise to the challenge of this moment." The circumstances facing Jordan, he said, required parliament to work with the government "with a sense of responsibility," and to "reach out to the people" in adopting legislation that would aid in Jordan's development. He concluded his speech by noting that Jordan is "with the Palestinians," as well as pledging Jordanian solidarity with the Iraqi people "until Iraq is restored to its natural status and its citizens enjoy a decent, free and secure life." NOTE: The King provided further details on his domestic agenda, reported Ref B, during a lunch with EU and G-8 ambassadors immediately after delivering his speech. END NOTE.

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SPEAKER RE-ELECTED HANDS DOWN  
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[6](#). (U) Following the King's address, members of the Chamber of Deputies gathered to choose between current Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali and former Speaker Saad Hayel Srouf as head of the lower house of parliament. Srouf, with the backing of

the Islamic Action Front (IAF), received only 38 votes, while Majali was easily re-elected Speaker with the votes of 68 MPs.

17. (C) Majali's convincing re-election is a stark contrast to previous votes for Speaker in which the parliamentary blocs were almost evenly divided between the candidates, allowing the IAF (with 17 members in parliament) to play a king-maker role (Ref F). By getting almost all the blocs to line up behind him, Majali managed to marginalize the IAF and thus has no strong political need to be sympathetic to their agenda. Asked by poloff why Majali received such strong backing compared to the previous Speaker election, MPs cited his "firm leadership" and his "willingness to stand up to the government, when necessary." Some also mentioned Majali's adroit use of the spoils system, wisely doling out positions in the parliament cabinet bureau and legislative committees - as well as spots on trips overseas - to help ensure a loyal and broad following. As one MP stated, "If you help take care of Majali, he'll help take care of you."

18. (C) A traditional East Banker, Majali has in the past expressed a cautious view toward reform. In November, for example, he publicly rejected a recommendation in the National Agenda to abolish mandatory membership by journalists in the Jordan Press Association (Ref E), though this may have been for other than ideological reasons. Despite his personal leanings, the current mood of national unity after the November 9 bombings - along with the sobering realization that King Abdullah almost dissolved parliament and could still do so (Ref B) - may prod him (and other MPs) in the direction of the King's reform agenda. The fact that the General Intelligence Directorate almost certainly played a behind-the-scenes role in securing Majali's victory might also keep him from straying too far from the palace line.

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STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT  
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19. (C) By putting together a strong team that avoids controversial figures that might alienate MPs, and one that includes ministers from all the politically important East Bank towns (Ref A), the King and Bakhit have helped ensure a smooth start for the new cabinet. Comments from a variety of MPs on the composition of the cabinet have been generally positive. Traditionalist MP and retired general Emad Maayah (Christian East Banker, Madaba), for example, said the new cabinet was "much better than previous ones," and noted that it contained "many strong and experienced men." Liberal, pro-reform MP Mohammad Arsalan (East Banker, Zarqa) said he was "satisfied" with the cabinet, and predicted it would have much smoother relations with parliament than did the cabinet of former PM Adnan Badran. Continued efforts by PM Bakhit to actively engage MPs on his agenda (Ref C) has further aided the cabinet's image. "He has done 80% of all the right things so far," Arsalan quipped. The few negative comments on the cabinet we've heard center on the lack of women and the inclusion of many former ministers. As one political analyst asked, "If they weren't successful the first time around, why should things be different now?"

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COMMENT  
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10. (C) The King's speech, which the media noted was shorter than usual, illustrates the main tasks of the new government -- achieve reform and improve economic living conditions while enhancing security. As a result of the current goodwill in parliament towards the government, there is little doubt that MPs will give Bakhit's cabinet a strong vote of confidence. A majority should also be receptive to at least some of the government's priorities, including new anti-terrorism legislation, still in the drafting stage. Even in the current political climate, however, the cabinet will face an uphill struggle to convince MPs to sign off on political reforms that might threaten their positions and privileges.

HALE